

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15

ACDA-10 MC-02 SAJ-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 COME-00 IO-10

OMB-01 /098 W

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R 131644Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5235

INFO USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USCINCEUR

USNMR SHAPE

USAFE

UNCLAS THE HAGUE 0755

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MPOL, MASS, NL

SUBJECT: DEFENSE BUDGET DEBATE--F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF: THE HAGUE 725

1. DEFMIN VREDELING TOOK FLOOR IN SECOND CHAMBER
FEBRUARY 13 TO DEFEND HIS 1975 DEFENSE BUDGET AND TO
REPLY TO PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO HAD SPOKEN EARLIER (REFTEL).
AS WAS CASE WITH CHAMBER MEMBERS, VREDELING DEVOTED MUCH
OF HIS TIME TO QUESTION OF F-104 REPLACEMENT, WHICH HE
DESCRIBED AS "ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS WHICH
A MINISTER OF DEFENSE HAS EVER HAD TO FACE."

2. VREDELING, AN ACKNOWLEDGED "EUROPEANIST," HAS BEEN
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EXTREMELY CAREFUL IN THE PAST YEAR INKEEPING HIS

THOUGHTS ON REPLACEMENT OF THE F-104 TO HIMSELF. HIS REMARKS TO THE CHAMBER TODAY WERE EQUALLY GUARDED AS REGARDS THE FINAL DECISION HE WILL TAKE, BUT HIS FEELINGS ON EUROPEAN COOPERATION WERE NOT MUTED. EMBASSY POUCHING FULL TEXT VREDELING STATEMENT.

3. FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF VREDELING'S MORE SIGNIFICANT COMMENTS:

REGARDING FEB 17 MEETING OF FOUR DEFMIN IN BRUSSELS--

"I DEFINITELY EXPECT THAT A CHOICE WILL NOT RPT NOT BE MADE AT THAT TIME." ON EUROPEAN COOPERATION--"NOT ONLY THE OPERATIONAL DEMANDS AND THE GREAT AMOUNTS WHICH MUST BE INVOLVED IN THE PURCHASE, BUT ALSO--AND NOT IN LAST PLACE--THE EUROPEAN COOPERATION ASPECTS MAKE THE CHOICE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT...WHICHEVER AIRCRAFT IS SELECTED--AND LET THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THIS, ON THE BASIS OF THE FACTS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO ME, I CANNOT MAKE A CHOICE--MY AIM IS, IN ANY CASE, BASED ON REACHING A SOLUTION IN WHICH THE CHANCE FOR REAL EUROPEAN COOPERATION IS ENCOURAGED WHEREEVER POSSIBLE, ALTHOUGH NATURALLY WITHIN CERTAIN FINANCIAL LIMITS." VREDELING SAID HE FINDS SUPPORT FOR HIS POSITION IN THIS REGARD FROM BELGIAN FONMIN VAN ELSLANDE WHO WANTS TO BUILD A EUROPEAN WEAPONS INDUSTRY AND FROM FRG DEFMIN LEBER WHO SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THE NINE IN ALL ASPECTS. CONTINUING IN SAME VEIN VREDELING SAID, "IF (EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY) IS NOT RAPIDLY REVITALIZED, THE FUTURE FOR THIS INDUSTRY, AS WELL AS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE, WILL BE GLOOMY." ON PRICE OFFERS, VREDELING NOTED THAT THERE WERE GREAT DIFFERENCES BASED ON CURRENT EXCHANGE RATES. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE CERTAIN GUARANTEES WHICH HAD BEEN MADE, THE CHANCE FOR ESCALATION IN PRICES BECAUSE OF CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS REMAINED GREAT, AND MUST STILL BE LIMITED WHERE POSSIBLE.

4. WHILE NOT EXPRESSING ANY PREFERENCE FOR THE THREE REMAINING CANDIDATES (F-16, MIRAGE, OR VIGGEN), VREDELING DID INDICATE THAT HE FIRMLY SUPPORTS CHOICE OF ONE OF THEM, AND REJECTS OPTION OF SELECTING CHEAPER AND MORE LIMITED AIRCRAFT. IN REPLY TO LEFT-WING MEMBERS (INCLUDING THOSE IN HIS OWN PARTY), WHO SEE PURCHASE AS UNCLASSIFIED

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SUPPORTING ARMS RACE, VREDELING SAID THAT HE DID NOT AGREE THAT PURCHASE WOULD BE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY. "WE CANNOT ENGAGE IN WISHFUL THINKING. ON BASIS OF WHAT I KNOW AT MOMENT, I CANNOT AGREE WITH MEMBERS WHO DO NOT WANT F-104S REPLACED." GOULD

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